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Washington to Send A U.S. Support Staff To Missions in Soviet

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 24 — The United States will begin sending American mechanics, electricians, plumbers, cooks, movers and interpreters to Moscow and Leningrad to keep the embassy and the consulate functioning, State Department officials said today.

If necessary, Washington is prepared to reduce the number of diplomats and other white-collar workers at its missions in the Soviet Union to stay within the ceiling of 251 set this week, officials said.

As a result of reciprocal expulsions ordered by Washington and Moscow in recent days, American diplomats in the Soviet Union suddenly lost their 260-member Soviet support staff, who were regarded as virtually indispensable.

The expulsions have evoked considerable hostile commentary in the Western European press, with many commentators voicing concern that the actions might derail recent disarmament efforts. But there has been little perceptible reaction from European governments. [Page 5.]

To replace the Soviet personnel who have been withdrawn, particularly with the onset of winter adding to the hardships of living in the Soviet Union, the Administration plans to shift State Department and military employees and hire new workers, officials said.

State Department officials were clearly irked by the sudden turn of events, which could reduce the ability of the embassy and the consulate to report on developments in the Soviet Union. They said Secretary of State George P. Shultz had not favored the ouster of 50 Soviet diplomats on Tuesday, an expulsion that touched off Moscow's decision to deprive the United States of its Soviet workers.

They said Mr. Shultz advocated expelling only five Soviet diplomats, in retaliation for Moscow's ouster of five Americans on Sunday, which in turn had been in response to the American expulsion of 25 members of the Soviet Mission to the United Nations.

Mr. Shultz had anticipated that the Soviet Union would retaliate sharply, either expelling 50 Americans or ending the employment of the 260-member Soviet support staff. But his proposal for a more restrained approach was opposed by Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d, William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, and Donald T. Regan, the White House chief of staff, according to State Department officials.

President Reagan took the tougher line, consistent with his concern about Soviet spying in the United States. The State Department was then given the assignment of announcing the Administration's action even though it was in principle opposed to it, officials said.

Help From U.S. Military

As a short-term expedient, officials said, State Department administrative personnel from other missions will be sent to the Soviet Union to help out. The United States military will be asked to contribute technical staff members, such as Navy Seabees, to replace Soviet workers such as electricians and plumbers.

In addition, American civilians will be hired and sent to Moscow or Leningrad, provided they pass security checks and are deemed able to adapt to the rigors of life in the Soviet Union. Some 22 highly skilled workers were hired earlier in the year as part of an earlier plan to gradually reduce the size of the Soviet staff.

There is considerable uncertainty on details such as how many additional support personnel will be sent to the Soviet Union. The Administration wants to discuss with the Soviet authorities questions such as whether any of them could be sent to the Soviet Union as temporary employees, not subject to the mutual ceiling of 251 American and Soviet personnel in each country.

'Professionalism and Dedication'

Charles E. Redman, the State Department spokesman, said, "We'll certainly be bringing in support personnel to do the jobs formerly done by Soviet employees at the embassy."

An official said the expulsion "war," as it has been called here, was the final chapter in the Walker case, the arrest last year on espionage charges of John A. Walker Jr., a former Navy officer, who confessed to spying for the Russians for many years.

That prompted demands within the counterintelligence sector and in Congress to cut down the size of the Soviet presence in the United States and to dismiss Soviet employees working at the embassy and the consulate in the Soviet Union.

On Thursday, Mr. Redman announced that the Soviet Union would also be deprived of the right to hire American employees for its missions in this country. But today he said the number of Americans so hired by the Soviet Embassy was closer to 6 than to 10, the number he cited on Thursday.

He said the United States had the legal right to bar employment of Amer-

icans with a foreign mission under the provisions of the Foreign Missions Act.

"We need a good, quiet and long discussion with the Russians on how to manage this thing," a State Department official, involved in trying to find substitute personnel, said today.

There are many jobs routinely handled in the past by Soviet employees that will be difficult to fill with Americans, officials said. These involve routine tasks such as sending letters in Russian to Soviet agencies for permission for travel and for releasing goods from customs.

Officials said they had not begun to calculate how much money would be needed to replace the Russians. Earlier it had been estimated that it would cost \$150,000 a year for every American hired to replace a Russian. But that was when it was assumed that Americans hired as service personnel would be in addition to the diplomats already there.

But since the American service personnel would be replacing Americans now there, the additional amounts should not be significant, officials said.

The most difficult question, an official said, is how much the primary job of the American Embassy — to report on Soviet political, economic, military and social developments — will be compromised.

Tass Cites Soviet 'Sledgehammer'

MOSCOW, Oct. 24 (AP) — The press agency Tass said today that the Kremlin had dealt a "sledgehammer" blow to the United States Embassy by withdrawing its Soviet staff. Tass called on Washington to turn its attention from diplomatic expulsions to limiting the arms race.

Tass said Washington's policy of reducing the number of personnel in Soviet missions in the United States to the level of American missions in Moscow and Leningrad "has boomeranged above all on the interests of the United States itself."

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